

Cross-sector Innovation Initiative

Grantee Progress from January through June 2020
Brief

CSII Six Month Brief: Pivoting for COVID-19 and Increasing Focus on Racial Equity

The [Center for Sharing Public Health Services](#) (CSPHS) and [Public Health National Center for Innovations](#) (PHNCI), with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), are co-leading the Cross-sector Innovation Initiative (CSII). The CSII is a three-year endeavor to identify and support public health, healthcare and social services organizations striving to build stronger, sustainable connections to better meet the goals and needs of the people they serve and ultimately improve health equity. The focus of CSII is the role of public health in these endeavors, but grantee's success relies on cross-sector collaborations.

This brief provides an overview of grantee's self-reported experiences from January through June 2020 and reflects changes to original workplans as a result of COVID-19 and an increasing focus on racial equity. Summaries of the original learning community projects can be found [here](#).

Impact of COVID-19

In January 2020, 10 CSII grantees launched projects to understand and support innovative multi-sector partnerships. **As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded across the United States, CSII grantees shifted priorities to address the immediate needs of their communities.** Overwhelmingly, grantees reported that cross-sector partnerships positively contributed to their pandemic response. Grantees shared that:

- Established relationships created a foundation that facilitated connection and coordinated response efforts.
- Existing partnerships aided in the engagement and trust of additional organizational leaders and elected officials in the community.
- A history of collaboration facilitated the sharing of resources and partnerships to further address disparities, racism, and social justice.
- Existing communication channels were used to address current needs and brainstorm around emerging issues.
- Early and consistent communication allowed for collaboration that ensured continuation of services among sectors.
- Partners maintained a sense of shared responsibility and support to conduct collaborative activities in response to the pandemic

Racial Justice in the Public Spotlight

As the pandemic spread throughout the United States, disparities were further highlighted by the racial inequities unearthed by COVID-19. Moreover, the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and many other Black people killed as a result of police violence brought increased activism and awareness to the realities of systemic racism. Increasingly, health departments declared racism a public health crisis, and began having more conversations and taking action on racial inequities in their communities.

Several CSII grantees had begun the year with projects focused on health equity, and events of 2020 spurred the remaining CSII grantees to incorporate racial justice efforts more explicitly in projects. CSII grantees noted unexpected and unique occurrences that affected their work, including:

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- Protests stemming from police violence against blacks, including George Floyd, increased community focus on issues of racial equity, with most grantees ensuring work is as inclusive as possible.
- COVID-19 elevated the importance of telehealth and the corresponding need to address disparities in digital access/literacy.

Tools and Resources

As part of the CSII learning community, grantees shared resources and approaches that they developed or adopted to help their cross-sector collaboration make progress toward project goals, including:

- [Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory Survey](#)
- [Appreciative Inquiry](#)
- [Human-centered design](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\) Cross-sector Assessment](#)
- Customized Equity Assessments and Pre-Tests
 - Assessments available in a CSII blog in 2021

Challenges and Opportunities

Grantees reported several barriers/challenges to their work, including:

- Many grantees had issues with technology implementation and adoption for staff and community members.
 - Technology could not always offer a replacement for previously existing programs, including in person community engagement as a means to hear community voice
- Opportunities to hear community voice, an integral part of grantee work, were diminished and grantees were challenged to find an adequate replacement. Workplans were reimagined and reliance on partners to achieve project goals became more than initially expected in order to reach the community
- Grantees were concerned with partner bandwidth as staff and organizations were pulled in many directions.
- Layoffs and furloughs in partner organizations led to decreased capacity.

However, **the crisis also confirmed the value of cross-sector partnerships and data sharing.** Throughout the first six months of 2020, CSII grantees began [10 unique projects](#) as planned, navigated the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and updated their CSII workplans to meet current needs. Project partners engaged in monthly learning community meetings, shared best practices, and supported each other through a challenging year. Moving forward, CSII grantees will continue to overcome obstacles and report on updates to their projects, highlighting examples of what can happen when community organizations work together to meet the needs of those they serve.